

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

APPLICATION FOR LETTERS PATENT

**Methods And Arrangements For Selective Placement
Of Movable Objects Within A Graphical User Interface**

Inventor(s):

Richard St. Clair Bailey

&

Stephen R. Falcon

ATTORNEY'S DOCKET NO. MS1-577US

1 **TECHNICAL FIELD**

2 This invention relates to graphical user interfaces (GUIs), and more
3 particularly to methods and arrangements for selectively placing movable objects
4 within the GUI based on user inputs.

5 **BACKGROUND**

6 Graphical user interfaces (GUIs) are popular in a variety of computing
7 applications and/or operating systems. A typical GUI provides visual feedback to
8 the user of his or her actions (e.g., inputs, and responses thereto). There is a move
9 underway to make more devices or other types of appliances seemingly "smarter"
10 or more user friendly by introducing similar graphical interfaces and like
11 capabilities. Thus, for example, a kiosk, automatic teller machines, microwave
12 ovens, video cassette recorders (VCRs), cellular telephones, and the like are
13 beginning to provide GUIs that are programmed to enrich the user's interactions
14 with the device. This may include, for example, adding selectable icons,
15 scrollable lists, and hierarchical pages.

16 More interestingly for this Background section, in certain instances,
17 physical user interfaces, such as, e.g., knobs, buttons, switches, handles, and the
18 like, can be graphically modeled and included within the graphical user interface
19 as selectable/movable objects. Hence, a user can graphically open a closed
20 drawer, turn up/down a volume control, or perhaps select a feature, product or
21 service.

22 Causing such an action to occur typically requires the user to provide the
23 requisite user inputs to the controlling GUI logic. This may include physically
24 moving and/or activating an input device, such as, e.g., a mouse, a trackball or the
25

1 like, which provides corresponding user input signals to the controlling GUI logic,
2 directly or indirectly.

3 Another type of physical input device is a touch pad or touch screen. Touch
4 screen are usually configured to allow the user to touch an exposed surface of a
5 cathode ray tube (CRT), liquid crystal display (LCD), plasma display, or the like,
6 through which the GUI environment and GUI objects are visible. Here, the user
7 may touch the exposed surface with his or her finger or some other object, such as,
8 e.g., a stylus. The touch screen includes a detection mechanism (e.g., an
9 electrically detectable grid array) is configured to detect the point of contact on the
10 exposed surface and to provide this positional information to the controlling GUI
11 logic. Provided with this positional information, the GUI logic can determine
12 which portion of the GUI interface and/or GUI object, the user is attempting to
13 select, move, alter, or otherwise influence.

14 Touch screens are particularly useful and popular in appliances that have
15 limited user input devices and/or display capabilities. For example, touch screens
16 are popular in personal digital assistant (PDA) devices, cellular telephones, kiosks,
17 etc. Unfortunately, when a GUI object is selected in a conventional touch screen
18 GUI environment, the position of the pointing device, e.g., stylus, fingertip, etc.
19 may not always be at or near the center or other preferred "grab point" of the
20 selected object. For example, a user may select a slider portion of a modeled
21 sliding control knob at a corner or along an edge. In the physical world, as
22 opposed to the virtual world of the GUI, one would not typically miss a slider or
23 other knob in this manner when attempting to move/activate it. Granted, sliders
24 and certain other types of switches can be pushed from an edge, but this would
25 only allow for movement in a particular direction.

1 Nevertheless, many conventional GUI environments model this unnatural
2 capability, while others try to automatically correct the situation. Thus, for
3 example, in some cases, an offset between the user input position and the GUI
4 object is determined and then maintained throughout the movement/activation
5 process. In other cases, the GUI object (e.g., the slider knob) is immediately
6 relocated within the GUI environment in such a manner that it is "correctly"
7 positioned in accord with the user's input.

8 While each of these implementations tends to work just fine, many users
9 may find the maintained offset or the immediate correction less pleasing. Thus,
10 there is a need for improved methods and arrangements that can provide for a
11 more pleasing and in some cases a more realistic user interface capability.

12 13 SUMMARY

14 Improved methods and arrangements are provided for selectively placing
15 movable objects within a graphical user interface (GUI) or the like, based on user
16 inputs. In accordance with certain aspects of the present invention, the methods
17 and arrangements tend to provide for a visually more pleasing and in some cases a
18 more realistic user interface capability.

19 Thus, for example, in accordance with certain aspects, methods and
20 arrangements are provided that allow for a gradual visual correction between a
21 user's input and a selected object. If an offset exists between a user's input and an
22 object's preferred contact area or point, then, as the user manipulates the object
23 (e.g., moves the object within the GUI) the magnitude of the offset is selectively
24 and incrementally altered over time/distance in a manner that is nearly
25 imperceptible to the user. This corrective process is continued, until the user's

input and the object's preferred contact area or point falls within some definable tolerance. Consequently, the correction process tends to be more pleasing and in some instances more realistic than an immediate correction or maintenance of a continued offset.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

A more complete understanding of the various methods and arrangements of the present invention may be had by reference to the following detailed description when taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings wherein:

Fig. 1 is block diagram depicting an exemplary device having a user input mechanism, a display device and graphical user interface (GUI) logic, suitable for use with certain implementations of the present invention.

Fig. 2 is a block diagram depicting an exemplary computer environment that is suitable for use with certain implementations of the present invention.

Fig. 3 is a graphical illustration of an exemplary GUI object in the form of a slider control switch having a selectably moveable thumb portion.

Figs 4(a-c) graphically depict the moveable thumb portion of Fig. 3 at different times while being moved and graphically modeled in response to continuing user inputs.

Fig. 5 is a flow chart depicting a process for selectively placing a GUI object within a GUI environment based on user inputs.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

In Fig. 1 a device 100 is depicted as having at least one user input mechanism 102, graphical user interface (GUI) logic 104 and a display device 106.

Device 100 can be any device, including, for example, a stand alone device, a peripheral device, an appliance, a hand-held device, an entertainment device, a communication device, a portable device, etc., that is designed to present the user with a GUI environment having selectable GUI objects, features or functions.

With this in mind, in accordance with certain demonstrative implementations of the present invention, device 100 can be included within a computer, for example, as described below and shown in Fig. 2, and within an auto PC environment of a vehicle.

Input mechanism 102 preferably includes a conventional touch pad or touch screen and associated circuitry and/or logic. Input mechanism 102 is configured to detect a touch location of a touching mechanism. Here, for example, the touching mechanism can be a fingertip, a pin, a stylus, or other appropriate object. The location or positional information that is derived from the physical contact is typically based on a coordinate system associated with the touchable area on the surface of the touch screen. The positional information may be directly associated with, or otherwise convertible to match, a coordinate system used by GUI logic 104. The resulting positional information is provided by input mechanism 102 to GUI logic 104.

GUI logic 104 can include hardware, firmware, software, or any mixture thereof. GUI logic 104 is configured to receive user inputs, for example, the

1 positioning information from input mechanism 102, and output signals that cause
2 display device 106 to visually display a GUI environment 108 having at least one
3 GUI object 110 selectable therein. GUI logic 104 may therefore include many of
4 the hardware and software portions as described below with respect to the
5 computer shown in Fig. 2.

6 Though depicted as functionally separate in Fig. 1, display device 106 is
7 preferably operatively and physically associated with input mechanism 102. Thus,
8 for example, in the case of a touch screen based input mechanism, display device
9 106 would be provided below a non-opaque portion of the touch screen so as to
10 allow GUI environment 108 and GUI object 110 to be seen there through.

11 Reference is now made to Fig. 2, which is a block diagram of an exemplary
12 computing system 200.

13 Computing system 200 is, in this example, a personal computer (PC),
14 however, in other examples computing system may take the form of a special-
15 purpose device, an appliance, a handheld computing device, a cellular telephone
16 device, a pager device, etc. Moreover, the arrangement in Fig. 1 can be
17 distributed between a plurality of computers/devices.

18 As shown, computing system 200 includes a processing unit 221, a system
19 memory 222, and a system bus 223. System bus 223 links together various system
20 components including system memory 222 and the processing unit 221. System
21 bus 223 may be any of several types of bus structures including a memory bus or
22 memory controller, a peripheral bus, and a local bus using any of a variety of bus
23 architectures. System memory 222 typically includes read only memory (ROM)
24 224 and random access memory (RAM) 225. A basic input/output system 226
25 (BIOS), containing the basic routine that helps to transfer information between

1 elements within computing system 200, such as during start-up, is stored in ROM
2 224. Computing system 200 further includes a hard disk drive 227 for reading
3 from and writing to a hard disk, not shown, a magnetic disk drive 228 for reading
4 from or writing to a removable magnetic disk 229, and an optical disk drive 30 for
5 reading from or writing to a removable optical disk 231 such as a CD ROM or
6 other optical media. Hard disk drive 227, magnetic disk drive 228, and optical
7 disk drive 230 are connected to system bus 223 by a hard disk drive interface 232,
8 a magnetic disk drive interface 233, and an optical drive interface 234,
9 respectively. These drives and their associated computer-readable media provide
10 nonvolatile storage of computer readable instructions, data structures, computer
11 programs and other data for computing system 200.

12 A number of computer programs may be stored on the hard disk, magnetic
13 disk 229, optical disk 231, ROM 224 or RAM 225, including an operating system
14 235, one or more application programs 236, other programs 237, and program data
15 238.

16 A user may enter commands and information into computing system 200
17 through various input devices such as a keyboard 240 and pointing device 242
18 (such as a mouse). Of particular significance to the present invention, a touch
19 screen based input mechanism 255 can also be included as an input device to
20 computing system 200. Positioning information is input into computing system
21 200 via an appropriate touch screen interface 257. In this example, touch screen
22 interface 257 is connected to the system bus 223, thereby allowing the positioning
23 information to be stored in RAM 225, one of the other data storage devices, or
24 directly to processing unit 221.
25

As shown, a monitor 247 or other type of display device is also connected to the system bus 223 via an interface, such as a video adapter 248. In addition to the monitor, computing system 200 may also include other peripheral output devices (not shown), such as speakers, printers, etc.

Computing system 200 may operate in a networked environment using logical connections to one or more remote computers, such as a remote computer 249. Remote computer 249 may be another personal computer, a server, a router, a network PC, a peer device or other common network node, and typically includes many or all of the elements described above relative to computing system 200, although only a memory storage device 250 has been illustrated in Fig. 2.

The logical connections depicted in Fig. 2 include a local area network (LAN) 251 and a wide area network (WAN) 252. Such networking environments are commonplace in offices, enterprise-wide computer networks, Intranets and the Internet.

When used in a LAN networking environment, computing system 200 is connected to the local network 251 through a network interface or adapter 253. When used in a WAN networking environment, computing system 200 typically includes a modem 254 or other means for establishing communications over the wide area network 252, such as the Internet. Modem 254, which may be internal or external, is connected to system bus 223 via the serial port interface 246.

In a networked environment, computer programs depicted relative to the computing system 200, or portions thereof, may be stored in the remote memory storage device. It will be appreciated that the network connections shown are exemplary and other means of establishing a communications link between the computers may be used.

1 Reference will now be made to Fig. 3 where an exemplary GUI object 110'
2 is shown. In this example, GUI object 110' is a slider control switch that can be
3 used to moderate a parameter, select a function, etc. GUI object 110' includes a
4 thumb 260 that is graphically modeled as sliding along a channel 262 in a linear
5 direction or path 264.

6 In this example, GUI environment 108 is based on an x, y coordinate
7 system as shown by directional arrows 268. Here, path 264 allows thumb 260 to
8 slide parallel to the x-axis and perpendicular to the y-axis. Those skilled in the art
9 will recognize that other movements, linear and nonlinear are also possible,
10 depending upon the type of GUI object 110.

11 Associated with thumb 260 is a preferred contact area 266. Preferred
12 contact area 266, which may be as small as a single point (e.g., a pixel on a touch
13 screen display), represents a visually appealing area on thumb 260 that the GUI
14 designers would prefer users to "grab" each time they selected thumb 260.
15 However, as stated above, this is not always possible; sometimes the user grabs
16 thumb 260 at a corner or an edge. Moreover, if the GUI software is programmed
17 accordingly, the user may actually completely miss thumb 260 but still be close
18 enough to fall within a controlling area about all or part of thumb 260.

19 In many implementations it would be undesirable to automatically change
20 the position of thumb 260 so that the preferred contact area 266 matches the
21 positioning information. Not only does this not match the physical world that is
22 often being modeled, but it may also cause a controlled parameter, feature or
23 function to be altered in someway that was not intended by the user.
24
25

1 Conversely, simply maintaining an initial offset that exists between the
2 positioning information and thumb 260 during subsequent thumb movements may
3 be distractive and is certainly not faithful to a modeled physical world.

4 To address these problems and to provide a more visually appealing GUI
5 experience, methods and arrangements are provided below that allow for a gradual
6 visual and operative correction between the positioning information and GUI
7 object 110.

8 For example, if an offset exists between a user's input and an object's
9 preferred contact area 266, then, as the user moves GUI object 110 within GUI
10 environment 108 the magnitude of the offset is selectively and incrementally
11 altered over time/distance in a manner that is nearly imperceptible to the user.
12 This corrective process is continued, until the latest positioning information
13 significantly matches preferred contact area 266 or falls within a defined tolerance
14 thereof, or the user stops providing new positioning information. Consequently,
15 the correction process tends to be more pleasing and in some instances more
16 realistic than an immediate correction or maintenance of a continued offset.

17 With this in mind, reference can now be made to Figs 4(a-c), which depict
18 thumb 260, as in Fig. 3, at various times while the user is moving thumb 260
19 towards the right hand side of the page (i.e., an increasing x direction). The
20 corresponding positioning information 270 associated with the touch point is also
21 depicted in Figs 4(a-c). For simplicity, in these examples, it is assumed that the
22 touch point is only offset from preferred contact area 266 in the x direction.

23 As shown in Fig. 4(a), at time t_0 , preferred contact area 266 is situated at
24 (x_0, y_0) and positioning information 270 places the touch point at (x_{t0}, y_0) . The
25

1 initial offset in the x direction is therefore equal to the difference between x_0 and
2 x_{t0} . There is no offset in the y direction in this example.

3 Thus, it would be preferable to correct the misplacement defined by the
4 offset in the x direction. In Fig. 4(b), at time t_1 , preferred contact area 266 is now
5 situated at (x_1, y_0) while positioning information 270 places the touch point at $(x_{t1},$
6 $y_0)$. The resulting offset in the x direction is therefore equal to the difference
7 between x_1 and x_{t1} . Again, there is no offset in the y direction in this example.

8 The resulting offset has been reduced by slowly allowing the positioning
9 information to essentially catch up with preferred contact area 266. This is
10 accomplished in certain exemplary implementations using a corrective factor that
11 effectively causes the movement of thumb 260 in the increasing x-direction to be
12 slower than that of positioning information 270. The corrective factor is therefore
13 associated with user's movement of thumb 260.

14 By way of example, in accordance with certain implementations of the
15 present invention, the corrective factor causes the offset to be reduced by 1 pixel
16 for every four pixels of movement in positioning data 270. Thus, for every five
17 pixels of movement of positioning data 270 in the positive x direction, thumb 260
18 will be moved 4 pixels in the same direction until such time as the offset is zero,
19 falls below a defined threshold, or the user stops inputting data. If the user were to
20 reverse the direction of the movement while an offset still existed, then the offset
21 would be maintained at its latest value.

22 Fig. 4(c), at time t_2 , shows that preferred contact area 266 is situated at $(x_2,$
23 $y_0)$ as is positioning information 270. Thus, there is no longer an offset in the x
24 direction since x_2 equals x_{t2} .
25

1 Though the corrective factor that is illustrated above is linear, there may be
2 implementations that can benefit from similarly configured nonlinear corrective
3 functions.

4 A process 300 for selectively placing a GUI object 110 within a GUI
5 environment 108 based on user inputs is depicted in the flow-chart of Fig. 5. In
6 step 302, at least one GUI object 110 is displayed within GUI environment 108.
7 Next, in step 304, user inputs associated with GUI object 110 are received. In step
8 306, a positional offset, in one or more directions, is determined based on the user
9 inputs and a preferred contact area associated with GUI object 110. In step 308,
10 the positional offset is selectively and dynamically reduced over a distance based
11 on subsequent user inputs.

12 It is recognized and intended that the above exemplary methods and
13 arrangements can be applied to both the x-axis and the y-axis independently as
14 well as simultaneously.

15 Although some preferred implementations of various methods and
16 arrangements have been illustrated in the accompanying Drawings and described
17 in the foregoing Description, it will be understood that the invention is not limited
18 to the exemplary implementations disclosed, but is capable of numerous
19 rearrangements, modifications and substitutions as set forth and defined by the
20 following claims.